

## SLP-KC Online Literature Review

**Book:** “How: Why how we do anything means everything...in business (and in life)”

**Author:** Dov Seidman

**Reviewer:** Jason Chan, Program Director, Scholar & Alumni Programs, Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund (APIASF), [jchan@apiasf.org](mailto:jchan@apiasf.org)

### 1. Provide a full citation of the book or journal article

Seidman, D. (2007). *How: Why how we do anything means everything...in business (and in life)*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

### 2. Brief synopsis of the book or journal article (what are the main points)

Through short narratives and storytelling techniques, Seidman engages readers in examining the *process* that guides our thoughts, behaviors, and leadership. His central thesis is that *how* individuals and organizations perform tasks is just as, if not more, critical to success as the task itself. In other words, it longer no longer matters *what* you do, so much as it does *how* you do it.

An illustration of this idea, and the foundational framework by which Seidman approaches each chapter’s main points, is the distribution curve of grades in a undergraduate course he once taught. Seidman observed that his students who demonstrated basic knowledge of the course material and performed solidly well earned a “B”, whereas those who were able to synthesize, critique, and immerse themselves in the complexity of the material earned an “A”. However, an interesting phenomenon occurred when it came to those who earned “C” grades; Seidman noticed that a good number of these students had understood the material better than the “B” students, but in their attempts to delve deeper into the material, they struggled and ended up flailing. It was as though they were on their way to “A”-level work, but hit a few road bumps along the way.

What does this tell us? According to Seidman, this demonstrates that simply knowing what to do (or what to repeat back on an exam) is not enough to achieve true mastery of a subject or skill. One must engage in a process of critical thinking, exploration, and experimentation in order to fully understand the nuances and complexities of the subject or skill; only at that point can true innovation occur, as one can now see and understand *how* to most effectively approach the task at hand.

Using this concept as a recurring motif throughout his book, Seidman leads readers through an exploration of common leadership and management elements: communication, competition, transparency, trust, individual/organizational reputation, culture and self-governance. In each chapter, Seidman offers an array of examples drawn largely from the business world, but which help to illustrate the importance of considering *how* one approaches and performs one’s work.

### 3. Usage. How could the book/article be used (i.e. text for a leadership course, a leadership training resource, theory/research based, or is it a supplemental reading)

Because this book was written with a bent towards business management and leadership, and not so much leadership as we tend to approach it with college students, I see this book

being used as more as supplemental reading for a leadership course. Individual chapters may be more useful than the book in its entirety, and there are several charts/figures that may even work as stand-alone resources.

**4. Level. Is it a book for students, leadership educators, leadership researchers? Is it good for freshmen or upper level students or graduate students?**

The book is written in a style that is easy to read, and is not laden in industry-specific jargon. The use of first-person narrative and the abundance of stories also help to make this book an easy read. It's suitable for college students of all levels and experiences, as well as for professionals.

**5. Personal critique. What is your recommendation for this book? Is it good, is not applicable?**

I'd recommend this book for both student affairs professionals and college students. Although it's written from a business perspective, a lot of the concepts (especially the core theme) are directly transferable to leadership in any context. I can see student organization leaders finding it helpful to reflect on the *hows* of what they do with their respective groups – both in how they lead their boards/members, as well as how the group performs the activities that they do.

**6. Rating. Provide a rating for the text on a 1-5 scale. 1 being "Don't bother", 5 being "a must read."**

My rating for this book would be a 4.